

# RCOC's

# Natural Beauty Roads

Why are they  
designated?

How are they  
designated?

Who designates  
them?



## ROAD COMMISSION for OAKLAND COUNTY

31001 Lahser Road • Beverly Hills • MI 48025

### Board of Road Commissioners

**Rudy D. Lozano**  
Chairman

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**Richard G. Skarritt**  
Commissioner

**Brent O. Bair**  
Managing Director

**Gerald M. Holmberg, P.E.**  
Deputy Managing Director  
County Highway Engineer

### RCOC Mission Statement

RCOC strives to provide the public with leadership in:

- Safe and convenient roads
- Sound financial management
- Responsive and dependable service

### Have a question for the Road Commission?

*Call or write:*

Department of Citizen Services  
2420 Pontiac Lake Road  
Waterford, MI 48328  
(248) 858-4804

TDD: (248) 858-4804

OR, visit RCOC online at  
[www.rcocweb.org](http://www.rcocweb.org)

## What is RCOC?

The Road Commission for Oakland County is Michigan's largest county road commission, with a 2,600-mile road system (including 850 miles of gravel roads). Only the state highway system is larger.

RCOC also maintains:

- ◆ Approximately 80 bridges,
- ◆ Approximately 1,200 traffic signals,
- ◆ Approximately 90,000 traffic signs and
- ◆ More than 310 miles of state highway.

## Safety first

As a matter of policy, major road improvement projects are conducted by the Road Commission based on a safety ranking system. At RCOC "Safety First" is more than a motto.



## RCOC:

- Is separate from county general government
- Receives the majority of its funding from the state-collected gas tax
- Has congested roads due to the tremendous growth in the county
- Receives no direct revenue from growth and development or property taxes
- Pays as much as \$950,000 to pave a mile of gravel road
- Pays \$3 to \$4 million to widen one mile of road from two lanes to five
- Is located in a state with a gas tax below the national average (even after the 1997 4-cent gas tax increase)
- Is located in a state that ranks in the bottom nine states in per capita road funding

## Natural Beauty Roads

Oakland County contains some of the most scenic roads in Southeast Michigan. There are tree-lined country lanes, beautiful winding roads through wooded hills and around lakes, tree-canopied neighborhood streets, urban boulevards and more.

In some instances, the vegetation growing along Oakland's roads is unique and significant. In those cases, residents can petition the Road Commission for Oakland County (RCOC) to designate the road as a Natural Beauty Road. If enough petition signatures are submitted, and if the road meets all the necessary qualifications, RCOC will consider granting the designation.

### What does the designation mean?

Roads are designated as Natural Beauty Roads in order to preserve significant native vegetation within the right of way of selected county roads.

RCOC promises to restrict its activities on roads with the Natural Beauty Road designation to the normal road maintenance practices that it used before the road was designated. This means RCOC will continue to trim trees and brush to provide for unobstructed views at intersections and traffic control signs, and grade the roads from time to time. The Road Commission may spray salt brine (salt water) on the road to control dust when local residents or the community make provisions, but it will not use herbicides to control roadside vegetation.

Additionally, before permitting others to perform work in the right of way that may significantly effect native vegetation, the Road Commission will notify the local community. The local community may elect to hold a hearing before the work can be performed.

### What it doesn't mean

The Natural Beauty Road Act does not restrict the activities of frontage property owners. That means it does not restrict additional development on property adjacent to the road. It also does not prohibit the paving of the road, though it does require that a public hearing be conducted before it could be paved.



### How is a road designated?

Residents of the community in which the road is located must petition the Road Commission seeking Natural Beauty Road designation for a road. At least 25 property owners in the community must sign the petition provided by the Road Commission.

Once RCOC has received and validated the petition, a public hearing will be held at which residents can argue in favor of the designation or voice objections. Next, staff of the Permits and Environmental Concerns Dept. reviews the road using a rating system developed by RCOC and recommended for statewide use by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources. The ranking involves rating the road in nine categories:

- native vegetation in the right of way
- rare species in the right of way
- environmental quality of the right of way and surrounding area
- scenic vistas
- bodies of water/wetlands
- wildlife
- development potential
- number of driveways, access or subdivision streets
- adequacy of the road

Once the review is completed, if the review results support the designation, staff will recommend that the RCOC Board of Road Commissioners make the designation. The review process typically takes about six months.

For additional information or petition forms, call the Permits and Environmental Concerns Dept. at (248) 858-4891.

### Preserving what makes your road unique

The long-term preservation of the vegetation that caused a road to be designated as a Natural Beauty Road is, in many instances, in the hands of the residents who live along the road. This is because RCOC does not maintain vegetation along its roads (with the exception of cutting or removing vegetation when vision is obstructed or for the safety of motorists).

Preserving this vegetation is an important part of ensuring the road remains unique.

The following suggestions can help to preserve significant vegetation within road rights of way.

- A. Avoid using herbicides to control vegetation.** Hand clearing or selective mowing is recommended.
- B. Limit mowing.** The best times to mow are early spring before wildflowers have sprouted and late fall after a killing frost. Early spring mowing will discourage the spread of woody plants and shrubs and fall mowing will reduce competition for light and nutrients and spread the seeds of mature plants.
- C. Avoid planting non-native trees and shrubs in or near the right of way.** Trees and shrubs native to Southern Michigan are preferred if plantings are desired. Tree species similar to those that exist along the road are the best choice.
- D. Avoid planters and annual flower arrangements.** Encourage the growth of native wildflowers found growing in the right of way.
- E. Landscaping should take advantage of the natural beauty of the area.** Formal landscape plans should be avoided for the areas near the roadway.
- F. Do not dispose of debris such as leaves and grass cuttings in the right of way.** Such practices are unsightly and may destroy plant habitat that supports rare or uncommon plants that grow in the right of way.
- G. Before undertaking a significant project or landscaping in the right of way, contact the Road Commission's Permits and Environmental Concerns Department (248-858-4891).** Staff may be able to put you in touch with area residents familiar with the significant native vegetation in your road right of way and may suggest methods to avoid adverse impacts.